

## SHAPING VISUAL SOUND: A FRIENDLY LOOK AT TOTAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE SUBCULTURE OF COMPETITIVE MARCHING MUSIC

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### ABSTRACT

*Visual sound* is the intricate blend of thematic music, marching, interpretive dancing, and colorful costuming that emerged in the early 1970s as modern drum and bugle corps and competitive high school marching bands engaged in field competitions against other corps and bands. The performance seasons for corps and for bands are intense, lasting only a few months, and each competition reflects a complex intersection of artistry, ambition, athleticism, and awards. This article is premised on the idea that a friendly version of total institutions is a latent development in the performance histories of drum corps and high school marching bands, and some personalized, illustrative, ethnographic, and numerical data, as well as descriptive narratives, are used to portray their emergence and role in this performance subculture. Rehearsal camps for corps and bands, and life on tour for corps, as types of controlled-movement environments, have become vital and virtual necessities for performance development and competitive success as musicians and dancers enter the fields of competition for their shows which last from ten to twelve minutes on football fields before fans, spectators, other contestants, and judges.

### INTRODUCTION

Drum Corps International (DCI) and Bands of America (BOA)<sup>1</sup> are two non-profit organizations that sponsor music performance and music education in the U.S. The domain of DCI is primarily drum and bugle corps, sometimes simply called drum corps, whereas BOA works with secondary education programs, especially high school bands. The two organizations were born at about the same time (DCI in 1972 and BOA in 1975), have common interests, and both set the performance criteria and judging standards for their respective participants.

I belonged to a small corps in its percussion/drum line, and my daughter was a member of a state championship marching band during her four years of high school. I have visited a corps and the band while in camps; attended many competitions; have taken notes regarding the music played; evaluated the programs with estimated scores and rankings; and, have compared my estimates against actual outcomes. I am also a sociologist who, having been in the army, having read Goffman's *Asylums* (1961), and having taught in prisons found that some elements of total institutions apply to competition seasons for drum corps and high school bands, but with differences of purposes.

Total institutions are usually seen as controlled-movement environments that are organized for the impartial treatment of their residents, with the administration having primacy over the individual, working to ensure

that power differential. In contrast, the total institution element of rehearsal camps and life on tour for corps and for bands is designed to build confidence, competence, artistic skills, stamina, and pride as the performance journey takes place. This project reflects an exploration into the differences between some traditional interpretations of total institutions with a variation of them wherein enhancement of the self and talents, not the mortification of them, are focal concerns.

This study is a complex one, involving several overlapping and staged elements. Included are discussions about total institutions as they have been viewed and studied traditionally; a discussion about the inspiration for this project; a discussion about how the *classic* era of drum and bugle corps evolved from its military background; how that era evolved into the *modern* one of DCI and BOA; an alternative look at the total institutional element of life for three performing units – DCI's The Cavaliers from Rosemont, IL, its Glassmen from Toledo, OH, and the Marching Grey Ghosts from Illinois Valley Central High School in Chillicothe, IL; and the performance schedules and score data from their respective 2007 seasons as they reflect tightness of life and partial registers of the effects of their training schedules.

The two corps and the band were selected as a combination of convenience, purposive, comparative, and biased samples: They were not chosen randomly. The Cavaliers is

my favorite drum corps, and it is a perennial favorite for many others. The Glassmen was selected as a comparative corps that is always a contending one, but it rarely wins big competitions. The Marching Grey Ghosts was chosen as the high school band because it is local, providing inspiration, and several people affiliated with it offered me their assistance and encouragement. Drum corps and competitive high school bands are not the same things, are closely related, and their features are generously interwoven. One of their commonalities is the creation of a total institution-like existence for their rehearsal and performance seasons, so a discussion about total institutions is in order.

### TOTAL INSTITUTIONS

Goffman did not invent total institutions: He outlined their special features and purposes. Others, such as social reformers, novelists, social scientists, and film producers knew about them long before the arrival of Goffman's book. Jeremy Bentham was credited in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with designing the panopticon prison wherein inmates are constantly monitored by guards, thereby reducing individuality and enhancing depersonalization; in 1862/2002 Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote about prison camps in Tsarist Russia in his book *House of the Dead*; in 1943 psychologist Bruno Bettelheim wrote about detainees' adaptive mechanisms in Holocaust-era concentration camps; in 1953 film producer Billy Wilder gave us the movie *Stalag 17* about conflict and turmoil in a p.o.w. camp in Hitlerian Germany, and in 1957 actor/producer/director Jack Webb released the movie *The D.I.* about U.S. Marine Corps boot camp at Parris Island, SC. We see through these illustrations that organizational concern for control over the lives of residents or incarcerants is maximized with concern for their comfort and well being minimalized, and this differential is ensured by three dominant features of total institutions: 1) batch/comunal living environments, 2) strict ordering of daily routines, and 3) the loss of individual autonomy and individuality because everyone lives their lives in common (Goffman 1961).

Total institutions exist as types of formal organization that operate under different philosophies and their memberships are filled in diverse ways. One basic principle of management is the belief that residents deserve

to be there, are threats to society, so life there must be harsh as punishment. There are many survivors of prisoner of war and concentration camps who have written about their experiences using the first-person voice of experience combined with social science. Some of those survivors who would confirm Goffman's study and the punitive element of total institutions would include Bettelheim (1943), American diplomat Alexander Dolgun (1975), Nobel Prize winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1973b, 1974, 1976), and sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (1950). Then, a modern religious movement is viewed from a critical perspective and a friendlier one that is aligned with the utility of total institutions for competitive music.

The Christian revitalization movement called *cursillo* emerged in the U.S. in the late 1940s, took root in the 1950s, and is a renewal staple for several major denominations. It has been described by Marcoux (1982), criticized by Dragostin (1970), and parsed by O'Sullivan (1988, 1989, 1997, 1999).

Entry into this redemptive religious movement and non-territorial community (O'Sullivan 1997) occurs during a sequestered three-day weekend of religious education as religious *seekers* (Lofland 1966) join to enhance their senses of religious self. Its initiates voluntarily separate themselves from friends and family to hear talks about religious piety, study, and action as stages of cognitive development (O'Sullivan 1988), the possible effects of appropriate linguistic skills (O'Sullivan 1989), as well as personal witnessing as the telling of retold epiphanies (O'Sullivan 1999).

Sleep, meals, meetings, and group discussion periods are tightly scheduled because there is much to be done in a short period of time that is managed by gentle mentors, volunteers, and personal sponsors. It is this very structuring, though, that Dragostin criticizes, claiming that the unsuspecting seekers are blindsided or lulled by the movement's bandwagon of moral appeals that are cloaked red herrings for its forced indoctrination and elitist membership, making it more totalitarian than humanitarian.

O'Sullivan, though, does not deny that controlled activities are elements of the *cursillo* weekend, but he feels that its purposes are more self-enhancing and self-fulfilling than Dragostin contends: People seek the *cursillo* weekend solace to become better Christians,

and there are amiable others to guide the seekers in their religious journeys. Likewise, musicians and dancers join drum corps and high school bands as *performance* seekers to become better at what they do, to learn about themselves and others, and to test their skills against those of other performers in competitions under the tutelage of skilled mentors, volunteers, and personal sponsors.

With the advent of each new competition season corps and band directors must recreate their performing units due to attrition from *aging out*<sup>2</sup>, graduation, or residential mobility, all of which requires the recruitment of new performers. For example, in 2007 The Cavaliers was composed of about fifty percent first-year members, and because all positions are open every year the auditions for limited placements are keen. A similar rotation occurs in high school bands because seniors graduate, others move away or drop out, and freshmen or other newcomers arrive. Some bands, like corps, base membership on levels of performance proficiency, while others, like the Marching Grey Ghosts, have open membership. Regardless of how corps and bands are formed they are more than mere associations of people who have similar interests: They gather to become members of performance communities wherein pride, cohesion, and masteries of skills are made through shared preparations as many become one.

The shaping of skilled performers' artful field shows usually begins in rehearsal camps, and are often continued with life on the road. Both require that participants and their chaperones lively closely and intimately with others, sharing their daily routines. Just as military enlistees, prison/camp inmates, and *cursillo* initiates relinquish personal privacy and some individuality for the benefit of the group, so do corps and band members for the show, challenges and personal growth, respect for self and others, the honor to have competed, and the emotional roller coasters that are felt during awards ceremonies. The purpose of corps and band camps, and competitive touring, is to enhance the skills of the musicians and dancers, but some of their defining features replicate Goffman's descriptions of total institution in the modern era of competitive music, and that realization served as the basis for this article.

## INSPIRATION AND FOUNDATION

This study's inspiration and foundation began on June 9, 2007 when I took a personal day from work and visited The Cavaliers in training camp at Eastern Illinois University (EIU) in Charleston, IL. The corps had been there for about a week, and I spent a lazy time at my alma mater watching the corps' drills and practice sessions. That evening I attended the 2007 program's preview performance and I then began to wonder if an article could be written about this subject? Later that month I attended the DCI Central competition at Illinois State University (ISU), and on the way home I realized that there were several personal, sociological, and cultural reasons for this work.

At the personal level it looked like fun: I am a big fan of drum corps and high school band field competitions, so I attended many local contests as "research." Sociologically, studies of total institutions have included analyses of seclusion, supervised schedules, and the common life of residents in jails/prisons, p.o.w. camps, work camps, mental asylums, hospitals, training grounds for members of religious orders, military schools and military basic training facilities, as well as tourist facilities, but not such an activity as this, even though it has been discussed outside academia. Kuzma (2004) wrote about the time he spent with the Denver Blue Knights drum corps, and Laine (2007) spent a year studying the Concord High School Marching Minutemen from Elkhart, IN, but neither author used specific sociological frames of reference, so that task remained undone. Beyond these, there are several cultural bases for this study.

We cherish independence, yet in the world of competitive marching music participants voluntarily relinquish this trait for the group. We are competitive people: We want to win at war and in sports, and a philosophy about sports states that to "win" second place is merely to be the first loser. Performance trophies for a competition's grand champion, first place, second place, third place, and other standings are sized proportionately. Music and dancing performances have moved from peripheral (Steward 1955), esthetic, and "high" culture arts into stylized contests attracting spectators and sponsors, alike: DCI contests, alone, attract more than 400,000 people every year (Drum Corps International 2008). Witness, also, the currency

of television's "reality" shows that spotlight competitive singing and dancing.

Historically, music and art programs have been accorded lower statuses and budgets when compared with other school activities. Many school bands are now accorded state- and nation-wide acclaim for their performances and programs, working closely with drum corps whose members often belong to each. Bands' performances during football half-time periods are now taped for review, and may be dress rehearsals for field competitions the next day. The assignment of diminutive and "nerd" statuses to drum corps and competitive high school marching is no longer in vogue.

Given such thinking, I recalled Berger's 1963 *Invitation to Sociology*. He invited us to pay attention to the sociology of everyday life, and with that behest in mind a combination of traditional sociology and a systematic look at the world of competitive marching music seemed inevitable, requiring a two-stage inquiry into competitive marching music's history.

### STAGE I: DRUM AND BUGLE CORPS IN THE CLASSIC ERA

Musical instruments have served significant utilitarian, ceremonial, and entertainment roles in the U.S. military. Today, all branches of our armed services have orchestras, wind ensembles, concert bands, chorales, parade bands, and some of them have drum and bugle corps. "The Commandant's Own" drum and bugle corps of the U.S. Marines may be the most renowned of them as it often plays in exhibition for, and recruits from, major DCI and BOA events. The repertoire of such parade bands or corps is often, and necessarily, martial music which can stimulate deep feelings of national pride and patriotism, and that same type of music was repeated by fledgling corps.

It was in the early years of drum corps history that several civic organizations emerged as being important to the art form, all intending to have positive influence on America's youth. One of them is the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), and at least three contemporary corps still endorse their founders: The corps are The Cavaliers, the Madison Scouts from Madison, WI, and the Racine Scouts from Racine, WI. Two other founding organizations are the American Legion (AL) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

whose influence started early competitions, whose very nature affected a continuing military presence on the field of competition for corps and bands.

Just as the modern rodeo began from friendly contests of horsemanship and wrangling skills between rival ranches, the idea that our kids are better than yours was unavoidable. Performance contests among posts within the AL and VFW, as well as between their various posts, began. The drum corps to which I belonged in a suburb of Chicago was sponsored by American Legion Post 422 in Berwyn, IL, and we were the Berwyn Blue Knights. We never went on competition tours because touring had yet to evolve into its current lifestyle. We rehearsed on Tuesday nights, worked on field maneuvers in a local forest preserve district, and the people of Berwyn witnessed our parade skills as we marched on their streets. We never went to corps camp because we did not need it. While we had periodic AL, VFW, or other locally-sponsored competitions we were a modest parade corps, paid for our day-trip participation. I left the corps after four years, and it was disbanded just several years later because many parents felt that it had become too regimented, demanding, and competition-oriented as its Director correctly envisioned the future.

The American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars have always had state and national conventions, and some of the staples of those gatherings were regionally-appropriate competitions between their sponsored drum corps, and those contests always had a strong military quality to them. Before we entered the competition field we had a "tick line" uniform and personal inspection to see if our clothing was clean and our white shoes spotless. The American, state, and organization flags were carried and guarded by corps members bearing arms – the color guard<sup>3</sup>; the music was based in 4/4 time; and movements on the field were in block formations as we marched forward, backward, sideways, in parallel lines, and at right or oblique angles like soldiers performing drills on parade grounds. Drum majors continue to call corps/band "ten hut," salute judges before and after their drills, and the uniforms for most corps and bands today still mimic the formal attire worn by officer candidates in our military academies.

Judging was conducted by AL and VFW

officials who were also musicians. All corps competed against each other without regard for size or skill levels which produced lopsided scores and assignment of awards. We entered competition at one end of the football field and exited at the other, while trying to engage in meaningful, artistic, and precise formations. If we left the field too early, stayed on the field too long, or strayed off the field we were docked performance points which then, as now, are based on a complex rating scale from 0-100 points.

Many members of early competitive drum corps, as well as their leaders, disagreed with the stringent AL and VFW regulations and settings, contending that the rules stifled creativity, membership potential, fair competitions between diverse corps, performance styles, independence, growth, and opportunities to compete. The watershed year of tension was 1972 when DCI was formed, signaling the beginning of the *modern* era of drum corps. Three years later in 1975 BOA was formed for high school marching bands, so DCI and BOA are just about "Irish Twins."

DCI conducted its first championship contest in 1972 (Wikipedia 2007a) and BOA followed suit in 1976 with its Summer National Championships and in 1980 with its Grand National Championships (Wikipedia 2007b). A second stage or era of competition and preparation had begun.

## STAGE II: DRUM CORPS AND MARCHING BANDS IN THE MODERN ERA

There was great historical animosity between drum corps and high school bands, and some of this tension was due to the fact that they competed for membership: Each could take talent from the other. My high school band director, for example, would not let me be in *any* band of his because I belonged to a drum corps. Some conflict may also have been due to a preference for a wider range of sounds than drums and bugles afforded. Concert bands use a wide variety of woodwinds, brass instruments, and percussion devices. Drum corps in the classic era were limited to true valve-free bugles, single-and horizontal-valve horns, and percussion instruments. Band directors were purists, so drum corps were perceived as being noisy, brash, and incapable of using or producing "good" music; but, that was before DCI and BOA. The unofficial link between them and their performing units is so

great now that the label of "corps style" often identifies the imitative impact that corps have had on high school and college bands, alike.

Before I get to the thrust of this article, the total institution element of competitive music, there is need to present some elements of this modern art form. I take this liberty and opportunity to spend some descriptive time focusing on financial sponsorship, instruments and music choices, field performances, and a philosophical debate about the purposes of corps and bands

### Financial Sponsorship

Since DCI is the parent body of today's competitive corps it helps to underwrite corps and competitions from private and corporate sources, but it cannot cover all costs. The Director of The Cavaliers told us at the June 2007 preview that the corps has an annual budget in excess of \$1,000,000.00. The Cavaliers, the Glassmen, and other corps must rely on a wide variety of incomes including tuition payments, paid performances, civic support, corporate and private donations, sales of memorabilia and recordings, booster groups, funds-raising events, sponsorship from instrument and uniform makers, as well as some monies from the U.S. Marines' drum corps. Alumni donations are also important: Early in the 2007 season, for example, there were problems with the portable kitchen of The Cavaliers and hastened donations from past members helped to cover the unanticipated and out-of-budget costs, and it was replaced for 2008.

The primary source of income for public high school bands, such as the Marching Grey Ghosts, is local tax revenue allocation and extracurricular activity fees, and income for private school bands is derived from tuition payments. Like corps, bands rely on their booster clubs, donation dinners, paid performances, local business sponsorships, sales of performance recordings, and other types of gifts. Several years ago, for example, the IVC band was invited to play in the Fiesta Bowl Parade and field competition in Arizona. My wife and I, like other parents, paid for our daughter's airfare and personal expenses, and the owner of a local logistics and trucking company donated one of his trucks and employees to transport the band's equipment.

The movement from AL and VFW leadership and sponsorship of drum corps led to

creative financial thinking, but the new era for corps and for bands did more than change the flow of money. It changed the way they were able to look at their instruments, music choices, and auxiliary performances to expand and enhance their field shows.

### **Instruments and Music Choices**

There is a good reason for the abbreviation of "drum and bugle corps" to the shortened "drum corps." Corps no longer rely on bugles. Instead, they use a variety of such multi-valve and bell-front instruments as all types of trumpets, the marching euphonium, the marching baritone, the marching French horn, the mellophone, the shoulder-mounted and converted contrabass/tuba, all providing balanced and tonal variety for open-field and outdoor competitions in football stadiums.

One of the biggest advances in field competitions for corps and for bands was the introduction of the stationary percussion section, or the "pit," in the mid-1980s. Just as the orchestra pit does not entertain on stage for live musicals and operas, these percussionists do not march on the field, but they do play in front of it. Their instruments include various mallet devices such as vibes or xylophones, tympani, chimes, gongs, wood blocks, amplified instruments (guitars, keyboards, even an electronic bass violin), hand bells, sleigh bells, cow bells, and anything that can be struck because these "toys," as I have heard them called, create special sound effects that marching instruments are incapable of providing.

The total impact of the changes in instruments from the classic era of drum corps to the modern one, and the joint modernity of competitive bands, represents a significantly wider range of musical options for both types of marching units. Among corps, original compositions are heard often because such music is designed especially to attend to the horns and percussion instruments which they use, and adapted scores are ones which highlight parts for specific instrument choirs. While we sometimes hear original compositions for bands, we hear more frequently combinations of classical, modern, and contemporary composers whose scores also offer balance between bands' brass, woodwinds, and percussion sections, providing enough tonal, tempo, thematic, and theoretical variety for dancers to engage in colorful,

intricate, and interpretive dramatizations of the music.

### **Changes in Field Performances**

Prior to the formation of DCI, corps competed with other corps regardless of size, meaning that small corps like my Berwyn Blue Knights and similar corps, like the Windy City Cadets from Chicago, went head-to-head against such Chicagoland heavyweights as The Cavaliers and the Imperials from Norwood Park. Small and open-membership corps were incapable of beating larger and more selective corps in open contests, as results from one classic era contest show.

The 1958 American Legion's State of Illinois drum and bugle corps championship was held at Lane Tech High School in Chicago, and I was there with my corps. The Cavaliers won first place with a score of 92.50, the Imperials were in third with 86.60, we were eleventh with a score of 68.40, and the Windy City Cadets was twelfth (last) with a score of 62.40.

To make competitions more equitable, DCI created divisions based on corps size and resources. Division III corps had memberships ranging from 30-79 members; Division II corps were allowed between 70-135 participants; and Division I corps, such as The Cavaliers and the Glassmen through the 2007 season, were permitted as many as 135 musicians and dancers. These categories were re-arranged and re-organized into the International, Open, and World Class groups (including The Cavaliers and the Glassmen) at the onset of the 2008 season (Drum Corps International 2008).

Just as DCI divides corps into stratified categories, BOA does the same for high school bands, each providing contest awards within classes, thereby maintaining degrees of equity among corps and bands. By so doing, DCI and BOA encourage high levels of enthusiasm, ever-expanding musicality, a feeling of fairness, and friendly competition.

Since DCI and BOA share common interests, they share more or less common provisions for field competitions. Having separated ways with AL and VFW rules, corps and bands no longer march from one end of the field to the other. Instead, their programs begin and end at mid-field, allowing for maximum audience visibility and pleasure, con-

centration of sound, and optimal opportunities for dancers to perform, too. For example, once in a great while the flags/auxiliaries – the dancers – of DCI's Vanguard from Santa Clara, CA perform their famous "bottle dance" at the fifty-yard line of the field with the musicians behind them, showcasing them. This dramatic performance is athletic artistry, and *all* members of the audience, regardless of corps allegiances, love it and appreciate its difficulty. There are also times when the pit section has a particularly inspiring piece, so the corps or the band forms a semi-circle around it, creating a band shell, and stepping off the field without penalty, now.

The changes are many, but there is one element of field competition that has kept its prominent place in the design of programs for both corps and competitive marching bands. Some competitions have a special trophy for audience appeal, and this maneuver helps the corps or band to earn it.

My wife calls this event a musical "surprise" because the corps or band has been moving away from the audience, playing softly, until it turns around, majestically readdressing the spectators. There are now complementary blasts of musical phrases from all instruments whose sounds emphasize a change of expression in the song or the program. I have heard people in the stands and "amateur" fans call this sequence a "bang and boom," and our daughter and her friends call this move a "park and blow." However, among such "professional" advocates as those who belong to "The Cavalier Nation" and groupies for other corps, as well as corps members, themselves, this explosion of sound is known as the "park and bark." Its sole purpose is to be dynamic, causing people in the audience to say "WOW!" because cheers and applause may be the only rewards the units earn.

Drum corps and high school bands engage in more or less similar types of field competitions, but not against each other because they are different types of units. While corps do participate in traditional parades and concerts, their primary purpose is to compete on the field. High school bands are busy throughout the school year, and competition is one element or phase of their music programs; but, some people feel that it is, or should be, the band's primary focus, and herein lies that which I call "The Great Debate" as it pertains to the competing cul-

tural issues: Do the kids join to enhance themselves as performance *seekers*, or do they join to be performance *winners*?

### The Great Debate

It is sometimes argued that the development of personal character and musical talents outweigh the importance of competition results and winning, just as it has been argued that the purpose of competition is to win, not to lose. While the mission statements for The Cavaliers and the Glassmen omit the word *winning* and fail to mention competitive performance, and while the Marching Grey Ghosts' motto is *Pride and Performance*, competition is a way of life and a measure of performance skills.

Differences between one philosophy and the other can be illustrated with two personal stories. As parents we were proud as the Marching Grey Ghosts won competitions when our daughter was in it; but we also felt anguish when it did not do as well. As adults we were proud of the band kids at the time of our son's death: About forty of them came to the visitation at the funeral home where they played *Ghost Riders in the Sky*, the band's signature song, for him and for us; and on the following day several members of the trumpet section were excused from school to play brass accompaniment to the church organ at the funeral mass. The purpose of drum corps is to compete, but the goal of high school bands may be more than that, which is illustrated by ideas gained during two interviews that I conducted during the course of my research. One of my subjects was the Director of the band and the school's only music teacher, and the other subject was a senior clarinetist who had just returned from band camp 2007.

When I talked with the Director and asked for his opinions on the comparative and competitive stances of *journey vs. competition*, *performance vs. points*, or the "Why compete?" issue, he had several comments. He tells his students every year that trophies in the band room reflect *nothing* that is objective about judging: The only fact that exists about the awards is that they were based on judges' evaluations on particular days. The judges' written comments on the performances they evaluated can be used to help musicians and dancers to become better at what they do, and those same judgments can help the directors improve their music

education programs.

Then, one of the questions that I posed to the musician was "Why do you like competition?" and she provided a long list of reasons. Her first answer was an immediate one: "It's fun!" she said. Other items on her response menu included the solidarity that exists among band members, being differentiated from the rest of their fellow students; after they compete and pack their gear, band members get to sit in the stands, for free, to watch the other bands and compare performances; she gets to evaluate the newcomers at the beginning of the season and wonder what they will become, then look at them at the end of the season to see what they became; to watch the *magic of transformation* (her term) as individuals become members of the collective and share common emotions when trophies are distributed; to look at the performances, scores, and placements when member unity is present, compared to when it is absent; and she feels wry pleasure when the band's performers convince the judges that they are good. She enjoys the competition.

Whether or not the scales are tipped in favor of personal development over competition, or the reverse, is matter of personal perception that can be debated *ad infinitum*. A necessary item to address now, though, is the friendly and constructive setting in which kids in drum corps and in bands shape their seasons' performances – the total institution element of the subculture of competitive marching music.

### TOTAL INSTITUTIONS IN THIS PERFORMANCE SUBCULTURE

Total institutions are formal organizations that have the responsibility of maintaining constricted lifestyles for prison inmates, for example, within walls. The total institution role for corps and for bands is different, referring to the need for arranged-living environments, without walls, allowing corps and bands to take shape, practice, and travel during performance seasons. The technical details of performances are learned and continually reinforced in close and closed settings. Drum corps did not compete often or regularly in the classic era, just as high school bands entertained mainly at football games and appeared in Homecoming and local parades. Controlled living and rehearsal settings were not generally required.

There are now about 100 DCI-sanctioned competitions every season, and corps travel from town to town, from state to state, to compete; and there are too many high school band field competitions to count. As premier DCI corps, The Cavaliers and the Glassmen start new seasons with weekend-long rehearsal sessions in the Winter; and in late Spring or early Summer members arrive at the corps' residential camps, such as the one I visited. When competitions start in mid-June these corps and others are on the move, constantly meeting tour demands. Bands' pre-season camp schedules and locations vary by philosophy and resources, but the Marching Grey Ghosts meets in residential camp for about a week before the new school year starts. There is little room for sybaritic comfort and individuation which corps and band members, alike, accept as they prepare for their respective competition seasons.

Corps and band directors cannot rely on public or private transportation systems to get musicians, dancers, other staff members, and equipment, from one site to another, on time. Intricate choreographies of corps and bands are not self-taught. There is no such thing as an *a priori* understanding of others' movements during performances: All must be nurtured and enhanced in common and commanded settings. The total institution aspect of life for corps and band members is a vital, if unanticipated, element of competitive music, and this demanded lifestyle is evident in rehearsal camps for corps and for bands, and during road tours for corps, which now receive directed attention.

### Corps and Band Camps

DCI's competition season begins in mid-June, ends in mid-August, and its premier corps usually compete in thirty to thirty-five events. Before the tour begins, though, the corps gather in various rehearsal camps wherein attendance is mandatory: The musicians, dancers, and staff members begin the process of shaping themselves into a community of visual sound.

The Cavaliers and the Glassmen had their first 2007 competition on June 16 in Annapolis, MD. Before that, though, The Cavaliers had extended camps at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb and at Eastern Illinois University; and the Glassmen held camp at the



FIGURE 1 - The Marching Grey Ghosts' Band Camp Schedule for Monday, July 30, 2007

TIMING	EVENT
7:00 AM - 7:45 AM	-- Wakeup and breakfast
7:45 AM - 8:15 AM	-- Stretching and exercises
8:15 AM - 9:00 AM	-- Marching drill blocks (fundamentals of marching) with "Dr. Beat" - an electronic and noisome metronome
9:00 AM - 11:00 AM	-- Program drill with rank and section leaders. Everyone must learn where everyone else is on the field at all times.
11:00 AM - Noon	-- Practice in instrument sections.
12:00 PM - 12:45 PM	-- Lunch
12:45 PM - 2:00 PM	-- Break with change to visit the floriculture gardens of the estate upon which the camp is located
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM	-- Practice in instrument sections.
4:00 PM - 5:45 PM	-- Program drill without instruments.
6:00 PM - 6:45 PM	-- Dinner
7:00 PM - 8:00 PM	-- Program drill.
8:00 PM - 8:45 PM	-- Basic marching, again with "Dr. Beat"
8:45 PM - 9:00 PM	-- Break
9:00 PM - 10:00 PM	-- Entire band rehearses music in pavilion.
10:00 PM - 10:45 PM	-- Rest (or more rehearsal, if needed).
10:45 PM - 7:00 AM	-- Lights out.
Midnight	-- "Midnight March" The rite of passage and initiation for freshmen and other newcomers, after which the seniors say "Welcome to the Marching Grey Ghosts!"*

\*This event usually occurs within the first two complete days at camp to help create solidarity early, and in 2007 it happened on the first full day.

University of Toledo and practiced in its Glass Bowl. While at EIU The Cavaliers lived on campus in one of the dormitories, ate dorm service food, and practiced in the football stadium and in other locations on campus.

Drills and rehearsals occur all day long and into the night. On the day of my visit The Cavaliers' sections were practicing by 8:30 a.m. with a lunch break around noon; the afternoon session began around 1:00 and lasted until about 5:00. The early evening session began around 6:00 and the preview program lasted from 7:30 until 8:30, and more rehearsal followed. Once The Cavaliers arrived in California for DCI finals its anticipated rehearsal dates and times during the week of August 6 – 11 were:

Tuesday 10:00am-10:00pm  
 Wednesday 4:00pm-10:00pm  
 Thursday 10:00am-2:30pm  
 Friday 10:00am-2:30pm  
 Saturday 10:00am-2:30pm  
 (The Cavaliers 2007)

Even with rest and food breaks that was a lot of practice time; but it was the end of the

season, the time for which the corps had been preparing the entire Summer. There was much to be done in a short period of time.

When corps members are on a college campus they are not exactly "roughing it," whereas camp accommodations for the Marching Grey Ghosts are rustic. Every August all band members, as well as their leaders and chaperones, have instruments, bedrolls, luggage, and personal kits packed into school buses and a truck for the trip to a 4-H camp in central Illinois. Other personal items such as electric fans, food, coolers, and bottled water are toted to camp by devoted families and friends. *All* campers live in cabins without air-conditioning, sharing living quarters with eight to ten others. Shower water is cold, and the drinking water has a metallic taste. Creature comforts are few, but they are not there for rest and relaxation.

The camp is about a two-hour drive from home; family members have limited visitation privileges; and the weather of central Illinois in August is usually steamy and unpredictable. It is here, after Summer pre-camps at home, that the show takes form with daily

Figure 2 - 2007 Tour Season for the Cavaliers and Glassmen

Date	Place	The Cavaliers		The Glassmen	
		Score	Rank	Score	Rank
	Toledo, OH			Pre-Season Camp	
6/02-6/09	Charleston, IL	Pre-Season Camp			
6/16	Annapolis, MD	73.900	1st	81.850	5th
6/17	Pittsburgh, PA	75.050	1st	65.100	4th
6/19				64.650	3rd
6/20	Decatur, IN	77.100	1st	66.000	3rd
6/23	Toledo, OH	78.550	1st	69.459	3rd
6/24	Belding, MI	79.950	1st	70.950	3rd
6/25	Erie, PA			72.200	2nd
6/26	Hornell, NY			74.050	1st
6/28	Oswego, IL	81.900	1st		
6/29	Normal, IL	81.300	1st	72.900	5th
6/30	Kalamazoo, MI	81.900	2nd	73.600	4th
7/01	Port Huron, MI	82.950	1st	73.700	3rd
7/02	Centerville, OH	82.700	3rd	74.100	4th
7/06	Michigan City, IN	84.459	1st	74.850	3rd
7/07	Canton, OH	84.400	1st		
7/08	Allentown, PA	85.325	2nd	75.825	6th
7/09	Dublin, OH	85.550	1st		
7/10	Charleston, WV	86.259	2nd		
7/10	Salem, VA			78.800	4th
7/12	Louisville, KY	86.400	2nd	73.300	5th
7/13	Murphreesboro, TN	87.500	3rd		
7/14	Atlanta, GA	88.125	3rd	77.900	12th
7/15	Jacksonville, AL	89.550	2nd	78.500	4th
7/16	Tupelo, MS			77.900	3rd
7/18	Lafayette, LA			77.900	4th
7/19	Houston, TX	90.400	1st	81.150	4th
7/22	Denton, TX	91.300	1st		
7/23	Midland, TX			81.250	4th
7/26	Dubuque, IA	91.450	1st		
7/27	Naperville, IL	91.900	1st		
7/28	Denver, CO			81.400	6th
7/28	Indianapolis, IN	91.950	2nd		
7/30	Ogden, UT			82.550	5th
7/31	Boisie, ID			84.500	5th
8/02	Portland, OR			84.750	4th
8/02	El Paso, TX	93.950	1st		
8/04	Phoenix, AZ	94.475	1st		
8/04	Stanford, CA			84.425	6th
8/05	Clovis, CA			86.750	5th
<b>DCI Division I World Championships</b>					
<b>Quarterfinals</b>					
8/09	Pasadena, CA	96.225	2nd	87.175	10th
<b>Semifinals</b>					
8/10		96.775	3rd	87.025	10th
<b>Finals</b>					
8/11		96.350	3rd	85.750	11th

\*Does not include all camp dates or stopover towns.

(Sound Machine Archives 2007; The Cavaliers 2007)

sessions for instrument groups, marching drills, and learning the program. As with corps' camps, band camp has little personal privacy, schedules are demanding, and this isolation is deemed necessary in order to create a minimum amount of distraction.

Parents and friends are granted a one-day, non-emergency opportunity to visit and to replenish diminished personal supplies. While family members are not allowed to transport the musicians and dancers to camp, just as they are not allowed to transport their kids to parades or competitions, they are allowed to take them home in private vehicles. These limitations are similar to those imposed upon visitors to prison, hospitals, and military "boot camps," and exist for similar purposes. When the band returns home to the new school years it meets during regular class hours, after school in a parking lot, and in evening sessions on the football field where visitors, like my wife and me, are welcome.

Dostoyevsky wrote of life in a Russian prison, and Solzhenitsyn (1973a) did about the same in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, so what is "one day in the life of band camp" like? My student subject provided an approximate timetable for Monday July 30, 2007 to answer that question, as shown in Figure 1. While there are daily variations in schedules, the timing of them is precise because there is much to be done in a short period of time between arrival on Sunday and departure on Friday.

Once camp is completed for the Marching Grey Ghosts' the secluded rehearsal period is also completed. The same cannot be said, though, for corps during competition season.

### Corps on Tour

Most competing high school bands do not go on tour during the fall season, but there is a Summer program that is conducted and sponsored by the Mid-American Competing Band Directors Association (MACDBA). Organized in 1972, participating bands from the upper-Midwest use this venue in place of Fall or early Winter competitions (Lane 2007) for good reason: Instruments are hard to play when fingers are cold, lips are chafed, and spit is frozen. Attention here, though, is placed on the touring competition season for The Cavaliers and the Glassmen.

Figure 2 provides several pieces of inter-

esting and related data about the corps. Each one had competitions that were spaced just several days apart; the competition sites were in different towns throughout the country; and as the season progressed the competitions become more widespread, eventually leading to the 2007 DCI championships. The corps were on tour: All of the musicians, dancers, staff members, volunteers, and equipment were transported daily in self-sufficiency for the entire season.

A competing corps needs several major pieces of equipment to accomplish this task. There must be enough coach buses to transport everyone, and the number of vehicles needed is dependent upon the size of the entourage and its composition. There are tractor-trailer trucks which are specifically designed to carry the corps' instruments, uniforms, spares of each, repair equipment, and a corps has its own built-in labor-force with the musicians and dancers to load and unload vehicles. There is often another tractor-trailer truck which, in other times, would have been called the chuck wagon – a portable kitchen – because everyone has to eat.

Just as religious seekers are the focal points of support in *cursillo* weekends, corps and band performance seekers are similarly upheld. Accordingly, there are many paid staff members from the Director to musician and dance instructors to medical personnel, as well as volunteers who do infrastructural and "grunt" work at camp and at competition sites. When at The Cavaliers' camp, for example, I met one of the coach/bus drivers who was working without stipend for the corps because her daughters had been with a corps, and she fell in love with corps life and its purposes. Her summer months were not quite as *total* as that of the instructional staff, musicians, and dancers, but her duties were different – to transport them safely and on time.

When the corps is being moved from one competition to another the people sleep in the coaches as well as they can, and when it arrives in a city for practice and competition they often sleep on the gymnasium floors of local high schools for which arrangements have been made ahead of time, and cooks fire-up the stoves/ovens in the portable kitchen. IVC has been a host school for The Cavaliers, the Madison Scouts, Pioneer from Milwaukee, WI, the Bluecoats from Canton, OH, Pacific Crest from Diamond Bar, CA in 2007,

and the Colts from Dubuque, IA in 2008 as they all prepared for DCI Central at ISU.

Competitions typically take place in the late afternoon or early evening. When they are over the corps members load and board their caravans and depart, arriving at the next way station for sleep on hard floors and more rehearsal for the next show, compete, then move on again. DCI touring corps repeat this process for two months. The Cavaliers' 2007 season, for example, consisted of visits to six towns before competitions began; and once it did the corps visited more than forty other towns and cities in just under sixty days, and the Glassmen did about the same.

Daily life in rehearsal camps for corps and bands, and life on tour for DCIs premier corps, all mirror the communal living arrangements, strict ordering of daily routines, and significant loss of privacy as the triune of elements for total institutions outlined by Goffman. Fortunately, though, electronic technologies now allow outside communication and inside recreation to alleviate the monotony of travel, communalism, and the isolation of sporadic contact with families and friends at a level that was neither imagined nor possible when the modern era of competitive marching music began.

### NET EFFECTS: COMPETITION SEASONS

Figures 2 and 3 are presented for comparative purposes. Figure 2 shows that The Cavaliers and the Glassmen were entered in many of the same contests during the 2007 season. More importantly, though, is the fact that they were spaced just a day or two apart from each other, on average, in different cities around the country. Precise timing and pre-arrangements were crucial.

Other data in Figure 2 show the comparative scores and rankings for The Cavaliers and the Glassmen. On June 16 The Cavaliers scored 73.900 points and won first place; and on August 11 it scored 96.350 points, finishing in third place in the DCI Division I finals. The improvement difference was 22.450 points, and the corps' standings throughout the early weeks of the season remained about the same, but sagged late in the season. Nonetheless, its consistently high rankings were anticipated because The Cavaliers was DCI Division I champion in 1992, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, and 2006 (The Cavaliers 2007).

The data for the Glassmen show some

similarities for the 2007 season. On June 16 its score was 61.850 and it finished in fourth place; and on August 11 it scored 85.750 points, finishing in eleventh place in the DCI Division I finals. The improvement difference was 23.900 points and its relative placements in competitions also remained about the same throughout the season, but with two significant variations in large events, and plummeting during finals. Rarely a top corps, the Glassmen has never won its DCI division title even though it usually competes in the finals, with its highest placement as fifth in 1998, 1999, and 2001 (Wikipedia 2007c).

There are several possible explanations to account for the changes in placement for The Cavaliers and the Glassmen in the 2007 season. Competitions early in the Summer are often smaller so the contestants are not as challenging; as the season progresses more of the better corps are encountered and the challengers are improving, also; and, fatigue may have taken its toll. The purpose of competition is to *compete* – to become as precise in performance as possible and to be better than an opponent in a contest. Someone wins. The DCI Division I world championship for 2007 was awarded to the Blue Devils from Concord, CA which was accorded a score of 98.000 points – 1.650 more points than The Cavaliers earned, and 10.500 more points than was earned by the Glassmen. Someone won.<sup>4</sup>

Since field competitions are limited to performances lasting from ten to twelve minutes, it cannot be concluded that drum corps performers undergo the season because they enjoy sleeping in crowded buses and on gymnasium floors for two months. Instead, these performance seekers opt for life of total voluntary involvement as they pursue the music, the dance, the show, meeting others, the combined allures of travel and competitions, the contests, and, ultimately, knowing themselves better.

Figure 3 presents an entirely different picture for the Marching Grey Ghosts. Its competition seasons for the past several years were composed of five to six contests in the Fall which were unevenly spaced on Saturdays, and only day-trips from home. Other than time spent in camp this band's members cannot live in such totality as their corps counterparts for one simple reason: They are still in high school, meeting their curricular requirements.

Figure 3 - Field Competition Seasons For the Marching Grey Ghosts\*

Year	Place	Date	Class	Score	Rank
2002	Monticello, IL	n/a	Pre-Season Band Camp		
	Pekin, IL	9/21	n/a	59.15	1st
	Washington, IL	9/28	n/a	81.90	1st
	Mt. Prospect, IL	10/06	n/a	74.60	3rd
	Urbana, IL	10/16	B	80.00	2nd
	Normal, IL	10/26	2A	79.00	1st**
2003	Monticello, IL	n/a	Pre-Season Band Camp		
	Danville, IL	9/27	n/a	89.40	1st
	Mt. Prospect, IL	10/11	n/a	73.50	6th
	Urbana, IL	10/19	B	91.00	4th***
	Normal, IL	10/25	2A	77.15	1st**
2004	Monticello, IL	n/a	Pre-Season Band Camp		
	Normal, IL	10/16	2A	68.55	1st**
	Urbana, IL	10/23	B	81.67	2nd
2007	Monticello, IL	7/28-8/03	Pre-Season Band Camp		
	Pontiac, IL	9/22	3A	73.50	2nd
	Geneseo, IL	9/29	3A	76.80	1st****
	Washington, IL	10/06	3A	81.10	2nd*****
	Urbana, IL	10/13	B	87.17	2nd
	Normal, IL	10/20	1A	59.40	1st**

\* Available, but not inclusive, dates and score data.

\*\* State champion for class.

\*\*\* Governor's Trophy for combined field and parade scores, classes C/D & B.

\*\*\*\* Grand Champion over all bands.

\*\*\*\*\* Grand Champion for combined field and parade scores, classes 3A & 4A.

A look at the comparative scores within each season shows considerable variation. Judges look for different elements in programs; not all judges are equally skilled or trained; not all competitions use the same criteria for class size; the competitors vary; scoring methods differ; a program may not be strong enough to maintain a competitive edge over the opposition; while the program remains the same for a season, it is modified as the Director sees fit; and, no two *performances* are the same, as shown in 2007's statewide contests at Urbana then at Normal. In the first of these the band took second place in class with a score of 87.17 points, but only three other bands scored higher in the entire show. A week later the band won first place in class with a score of 59.40 points that represent a difference of -27.77 points from the previous week. Two possible explanation for this shift are that the judging styles were different, and the judges looked for different elements of proficiency. Regardless of scores, though, first

place in class in the state competition is still first place in class in the state competition.

During the 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2007 seasons the band was able to earn the title of winner in its class in the contest which is recognized as the state championship event, and 2003 was a banner year for the band. On successive weekends it earned the title of state champion in its class, as well as the Governor's Trophy for combined contests and combined small-band classes at the other state-wide competition.

Drum and bugle corps and competitive high school marching bands are not the same, so as Weber (1983 45) might argue it would be unfair to contend that one of these art forms is superior to the other. Their instruments are different, as are their sounds. Corps memberships are based on auditions every year, whereas bands may or may not be. Their organizations and finances are also diverse. DCI oversees one, and BOA oversees the other. Their competition schedules and seasons are different. When the

drum corps competition season is completed, the corps disperse until auditions are completed and rehearsals begin during the Winter and Spring months; but when high school band competition season is completed, the students return to their regular classes the next week. Corps and band members make different kinds and degrees of personal sacrifices. Collectively, though, competitive corps and high school bands are composed of countless numbers of young people who enjoy the challenges and the opportunities which the subculture of visual sound has to offer them, as they create it.

### CONCLUSION

When most of us think about total institutions we are probably inclined to view them as harsh places of residence with an overbearing administrative and caretaking staff. Prisons, concentration camps, military boot camps are likely to be high on our lists of examples, but lower on those same lists we might see summer camps for our kids or exotic cruises on luxury sea liners. There are no real descriptive differences between them, but the variation lies in purpose: Some are designed to separate people from society as punishment or soldierly training, and others are for recreation.

Another type of total institution exists as training grounds for the religious, as when people seek professional religious orders, or when laypeople seek a better understanding of their religious selves by attending such a religious renewal weekend as *cursillo*. If we change, slightly, the expression *religious seeker* to *performance seeker* we can take a look at today's competitive marching music and the role that total institutions play in it.

Young musicians and dancers join drum and bugle corps and competitive high school marching bands in order to enhance their performance skills as the corps and bands engage in tense field competitions during short seasons – several months in the Summer for corps and several months in the Fall for bands. Since there is much to be done in a short period of time for both corps and bands, communal living arrangements, tight schedules, and significant loss of privacy are needed in rehearsal camps or on tour as the corps and bands are shaped from being loose associations of musicians and dancers into cohesive performing units for this modern subculture of competitive marching

music.

### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bands of American became Music for All in the Spring of 2007 to encompass a wider range of high school music education programs. The old name of BOA was retained here for conversational convenience.

<sup>2</sup> Musicians and dancers can participate in drum corps between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one or twenty-two years, depending on their birthdates. If a person has a twenty-second birthday which falls just two days before the competition season starts, eligibility is lost; but, if another person has a twenty-second birthday falling just two days after the season begins, eligibility is maintained. Those who have *aged-out* may choose to participate in the smaller and non-competitive Drum Corps of America, work for a corps, simply move on, or participate in another performing art. Some enterprising and former members of the disbanded DCI Division I Star of Indiana, for example, created the successful and entertaining touring troupe called *Blast* that presents corps-style music in a lively, colorful, and fast-paced stage production.

<sup>3</sup> Drum corps and competing high school bands no longer carry national, state, or organization flags onto the field of competition, yet the expression "color guard" is still here. Today, this unit may be called the color guard, the flag corps, or the auxiliaries, but they are the dancers who perform visual interpretations of the music. The presence of dancers engaging in balletic movements while twirling imitation rifles and sabres is a symbolic reference to the military background of field competitions.

<sup>4</sup> This article was based on DCI data and scores from the 2007 season, and since then the 2008 season has been completed. The 2008 DCI World Class competitions were held in Bloomington, IN with the following results: The Quarterfinals were on August 7<sup>th</sup> and The Cavaliers placed 2<sup>nd</sup> with a score of 97.050, and the Glassmen were 11<sup>th</sup> with 87.625 points; the Semifinals were on August 8<sup>th</sup> and The Cavaliers had 97.555 points and placed 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the Glassmen earned 88.125 points for 13<sup>th</sup> place; the Finals were on August 9<sup>th</sup> and The Cavaliers' 97.325 put the corps in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, while the Glassmen was scored with 87.200 points for 11<sup>th</sup> place. The DCI World Class Champion for 2008 was the Phantom Regiment from Rockford, IL which earned 97.125 points (Sound Machine Archives 2008; The Cavaliers 2008).

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